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Hero-Stones of Krishnagiri District in Indian state of Tamilnadu

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Krishnagiri district is located in the Indian state of Tamil Nadu. The history of this region starts with the presence of habitats of mankind during Palaeolithic, Neolithic and Mesolithic Ages. Various rock paintings and rock carvings of Indus Valley civilization and Iron Age were found in this district. The excavations carried out in the places like Mallappadi, Guttur, Gollapalli and Thogarapalli in Krishnagiri district revealed more artefacts belonging to Old Stone Age. Late Stone Age sites were also discovered at Pudur, Gollapalli, Togarapalli, Mullaikadai, Bannaimadulu and Dailamalai¹. Bruce Foote and P. Bosworth discovered crude clumsy implements from trap dykes at Bargur in Krishnagiri district considered to be one of the oldest settlements of the Neolithic Man². The 2000 year old megalithic burial site in Mallachandiram near Krishnagiri has over 200 dolmens is considered to be the largest in the state of Tamilnadu³. Krishnagiri region was ruled by the famous dynasties like Kongu, Chera, Cholas, Pallavas, Gangas, Nulambas, Hoysalas, Vijaya Nagar, Bijapur, Wodeyars of Mysore and Nayaks of Madurai. In ancient period it was called as 'Eyil Nadu', 'Murasu Nadu', 'Kowoor Nadu', 'NigariliCholaMandlam', 'VidhugadhazhagiNallur', and 'Nulambadi'. It was separated from Dharmapuri district on 9th February, 2004 and surrounded by Vellore and Thiruvannamalai district in the East and Karnataka State in the West, State of Andhra Pradesh in the North and Dharmapuri district in the South. The district total area is about 5143sq.kilometres. Now it consists of seven taluks namely Krishnagiri, Hosur, Pochampalli, Uthangarai, Shoolagiri, Bargur and Denkanikottai. Through this paper an attempt to carve out the immense importance of the availability of epigraphical source of hero-stones to construct and reconstruct the glorious past of the Krishnagiri district.

The erection of hero-stones in the honour of a brave man or woman, who died in a brave or heroic action, is common phenomenon in all civilizations. These memorials took different forms in different countries and in different ages. In Tamil Nadu, the act of erecting memorials gets its stable foot in the megalithic culture. The Sangam bards speak about the rituals for erecting hero-stones. Hero-stones were considered as a primary source to study a different aspects of common peoples life and culture, their mode of warfare, dress, ornaments, hair style, weapons, animals and to a certain extent their habits, customs, beliefs, languages etc. It was usually divided into three panels, but some of them occasionally into four or five panels depending on the event. The upper panel depicts the subject worshipping a deity,

the middle panel depicts the hero, and the lower panels describe the battle scenes. They often carry inscriptions displaying the variety of adornments, including bas relief panels, decoration, and figures on carved stone. The carved inscription of hero-stones speaks about the heroic actions of the warriors, the battle, the name of king and those who involved in those heroic actions. Hero-stones were erected usually for honouring the warriors and individuals who lost or sacrifice their lives for the sake of a king, country, society etc., They are usually in the form of a stone monument and called as planted stones or 'natukal' in Tamil and 'Veerakallu' in Kannada.

From time immemorial the Tamil peoples followed the tradition of erecting hero stones for those who sacrifice their lives for the sake of their kings in Tamil Nadu. Krishnagiri district has fertile in hero-stones and they recorded the heroic actions of the individuals in the battlefield, pig hunting, snake killing etc., Multi-lingual people lived in this region with harmony and their hero stones bear inscriptions in Tamil, Telugu and Kannada. A hero-stone of Ayyappadeva from Reddiur in Uthangarai taluk of Krishnagiri district recorded that one Aryakutti, servant of Idusappaiyar of Venadu lost his life in pig hunting. The hero-stones found in Kundani region, which is located 22kms away from Krishnagiri, are unique type called Navakanda sculptures. Navakandam means Nine Cuts. A heroic soldier ritually cuts himself in nine places and dies in front of their deities for the welfare and success of the king and kingdom in a war. This was a great patriotic act. The people who have sacrificed their lives for sake of the country are honoured by the Tamils. Jeyamkondar refers 'Nava Kandam' in his renowned work 'Kalingathu Parani'. The Sangam bard Tolkappiam speaks about 'Avipali' or self-sacrifice by warriors and Manimekalai also speaks about these human sacrifices. Maravars of Tamil Nadu and Nayars of Kerala were practiced this as a ritual. "Vairavi", a community in Madurai are always ready to sacrifice their lives for any noble cause in those centuries. Hero-stones should also consider as primary source to construct or reconstruct in the process of making one's regional native history.

Nolambas had their hegemony over Krishnagiri district from 9th century⁴ was characterised by the erection of many hero-stones in this region, witnessed they are the pioneers for honoured the brave actions. From time immemorial, whether it is to express one's supreme love for gods, kings and lords people have sacrificed their lives. Self-sacrifice is the noblest of all sacrifices, but most martyrs killed themselves for a social cause they espoused or for the welfare of their benefactors. Likewise, Krishnagiri district also observed with the land of martyrs due to the availability of numerous hero-stones.

Mahendra Nolamba was succeeded by his son Ayyappadeva. A hero-stone erected during his period speaks about the battle between Gangas and Nolambas⁵. Ayyappadeva was succeeded by his son Anniga also known as Bira Nolamba. A hero-stone found in the Muthanur Village of Krishnagiri district speaks about his ascendancy to the throne in the year 923 A.D.⁶. Nolambas had become subordinates of Rashtrakutas during his region. An incident of cattle raid is mentioned on a hero-stone of the fifteenth year of Bira Nolamba from Periabompatti in the Uthangarai taluk of Krishnagiri district⁷. According to the inscription on the hero-stone Sekathur Manikkadayanar lost his life in an attempt to recapture the cattle which was raided by the enemies. Another hero-stone of the same year of Bira Nolamba at the same place speaks about the death of a hero with his servants when he recaptured the cattle which were raided by Mamandayan, the ruler of Sevathur.

Hero-stones were erected not only to the heroes who lost their lives in the battle fields of cattle raids and also for those who lost their lives in some adventurous actions. For instance, a hero-stone of Ayyappadeva's regime from Reddiur in Uthangarai taluk of Krishnagiri district speaks about one Arayakutti, servant of Idusappaiyar of Venadu lost his life in pig hunting also recorded in the annals of Krishnagiri district.

During the hegemony of Cholas over Krishnagiri region was also witnessed with the erection of hero-stones. A hero-stone found at Gangavaram belonging to the 25th regnal year of Rajendra Chola recorded the death of Kamundan of Yelinadu during the conflict with the people of Bangalanadu for the possession of cattle. Yelinadu refers to modern Krishnagiri region and Bangalanadu refers to modern Vellore region. This epigraphical source confirmed that these minor conflicts for the possession of cattle were regular in those times in these regions⁸. Hera Hodahalli inscription in Harur taluk speaks about this conflict for cattle raids⁹. Rajadhirajan I ruled over Chola Empire for thirty six years from 1018 to 1054 A.D. six inscriptions belong to this ruler have been discovered from Krishnagiri region. From these inscriptions, it is known that he was referred as Vijayarajendiran. A hero-stone belong to the period of Rajadhirajan I found at Kattadikuppam in Krishnagiri taluk was damaged to such an extent that speaks not more than that the name of the village as “Vijayarajendira Mandalathi Aeilnattunelayur”¹⁰.

Kundani is located in Hosur taluk of Krishnagiri district. It was the capital of Vira Ramanatha, the Hoysala king during the 13th century. A unique type of hero-stones found in this called Navakanda sculptures. Some of them are preserved in the Government Museum, Dharmapuri. From one of the hero-stones of Navakanda type is known as that one hero cut the head of another soldier and fled away on a horse. This sculpture is said to be the period of the king Chikpamithalwan, son of Mallapurvathirajan. In a sculpture at Kundani, it is depicted that a soldier cut the head of a soldier and gave it to another soldier who kept it in a basket and fled away on a horse. This horrible scene depicted in the sculpture reveal the historic fact that Saktham, a unique kind of worship of beheading human beings to please God was prevalent in Kundani region during the 12th and 13th centuries and from another inscriptions, it was established that similar practice existed at Panneswarar Madam.

Krishnagiri district is situated at the frontier provinces of Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh was ruled by various rulers belong to various dynasties from time immemorial. The climate of this district in generally was salubrious. The areas like Denkanikotta, Hosur, Thally, Krishnagiri etc., were very cool and pleasant. It comprising of forests with pasture lands called as Mullai. Tamil sangam works says that Mullai provinces were inhabited by the Ayar whose occupation was cattle-breeding. So no doubt, the lives of the peoples in these areas centred with the cattle. Cattle-breeding was the main occupation of the peoples of Krishnagiri district due to its pasture (Mullai) wealth in nature. So the cattle raids were happened frequently in this region in those periods. Continuous conflicts were inevitable due to these cattle raids and made the peoples of these region very brave warriors and great patriots. Plenty of Hero Stones available in this region speaks about the selflessness courageous of the peoples in the Krishnagiri district. The sati stones and the hero stones of individuals illuminated the virtues and valour of the Krishnagiri peoples as the Tamil literatures praise. To illuminate the past glorious of this region, an in-depth research study is need of this hour.

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